

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 12695

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT BE CG

SUBJEC: BELGIAN POLITICAL SCENE: SIMONET DENIES

"NEWSWEEK" ALLEGATIONS

1. AN ITEM (THE BELGIAN FEUD") IN THE "PERISCOPE" SECTION OF THE JUNE 26 INTERNATIONAL EDITION OF "NEWSWEEK" ALLEGED THAT THE "REAL STORY" BEHIND JUNE 15-19 BELGIAN GOVERNMENT CRISIS WAS A CLASH BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS AND FOREIGN MINISTER SIMONET RESULTING FROM SIMONET'S HAVING KEPT TINDEMANS UNINFORMED DURING LAST MONTH'S INVASION OF ZAIRE. ACCORDING TO "NEWSWEEK", THE BELGIAN AMBASSADOR IN KINSHASA SENT MINUTE-TO-MINUTE REPORTS ON TURMOIL IN KOLWEZI, INCLUDING ON MASSACRES OF EUROPEANS, BUT SIMONET "IS SAID TO HAVE SAT ON THE MESSAGES BECAUSE HE OPPOSED A BELGIAN RESCUE OPERATION." A FOREIGN MINISTRY AIDE, "NEWSWEEK" ADDED, FINALLY TIPPED OFF TINDEMANS.

2. ECHOED SEVERAL DAYS LATER IN THE BELGIAN PRESS, THE STORY DREW A FORMAL DENIAL FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. IN A JUNE 27 COMMUNIQUE A MINISTRY SPOKESMAN SAID THAT SIMONET HAD SENT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF "NEWSWEEK" FLATLY DENYING THE ALLEGATIONS CONTAINED IN THE

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ARTICLE, AND AFFIRMING THAT ALL RELEVANT INFORMATION CONCERNING SHABA HAD BEEN IMMEDIATELY AND AUTOMATICALLY PASSED TO THE PRIME MINISTER AND TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE. THE COMMUNIQUE POINTED OUT THAT TINDEMANS HAD HIMSELF ANNOUNCED THAT THE DELIBERATIONS OF THE SHABA CRISIS COMMITTEE HAD BEEN BASED ON INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM "THE MINISTRIES CONCERNED", AND THAT THERE HAD BEEN

COMPLETE SOLIDARITY AMONG THE MINISTERS WITH REGARD TO
BELGIUM'S HUMANITARIAN OPERATION IN SHABA.

3. COMMENT. THERE HAVE BEEN NUMEROUS DIFFERENCES
DURING THE PAST YEAR BETWEEN TINDEMANS AND SIMONET
(BRUSSELS 6839), BUT THE SHABA CRISIS WAS ONE OCCASION
ON WHICH, WHILE THERE WERE SOME PROBLEMS IN COMMUNICATION,
THEY WORKED RELATIVELY WELL TOGETHER, WITH SIMONET AS
WELL AS TINDEMANS BACKING HUMANITARIAN OPERATION TO
RESCUE EUROPEANS IN KOLWEZI (BRUSSELS 10940). IN ANY
CASE, WE SEE NO REASON AT ALL TO CONNECT SHABA CRISIS
WITH TINDEMANS' DECISION TO SUBMIT HIS RESIGNATION TO
KING FOLLOWING AN ALL-NIGHT DISCUSSION ON ANTI-CRISIS
BUDGET BILL WHICH, AS SO OFTEN HAPPENS IN BELGIUM,
WAS AGGRAVATED BY STICKY REGIONALIZATION QUESTION.
"NEWSWEEK'S" PERISCOPE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN FOGGED OVER
ON THIS ONE. DE TARR

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